

RANK-SHIFTING AS A LINGUISTIC DEVICE IN THE POETRY OF TANURE OJAIDE

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Abstract

This paper examines rank-shifting as a linguistic device in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide with the aim of showing how it helps the poet in the projection of the plight of the Niger Delta people and the socio-political problems in his country, Nigeria. The study is guided by M. A. K. Halliday's "Scale and Category Grammar" as a theoretical framework and it adopts Adejare and Adejare's (1996 and 2006) clause and group structural descriptive pattern in the analysis. Six poems are purposively selected from three different collections of Ojaide's poetry based on the manifestation of rank-shifted structures and a detailed qualitative close analysis is carried out. The result shows that the use of rank-shifted groups and clauses as adjuncts provide circumstantial information. As qualifiers and elements of clause structure, they also aid the poet as a meaning making device and enable him to relate the messages of the poems to their socio-situational contexts. Shift in rank aids the poet in the realisation of the desired meanings on the heads of nominal groups as it provides information, which can be regarded as news on the head of a nominal group.

Key words: rank-shifting, groups, clauses, poetry, Tanure Ojaide

Introduction: The Concept of Rank-shifting

The term rank shift is used to refer to a linguistic process in which a given grammatical unit is shifted down the rank scale so that it operates within the structure of a lower grammatical unit or within the structure of a grammatical unit of equal rank (Crystal, 2008:402). It is a structural adjustment which permits a grammatical unit of a higher rank to be shifted down the scale so that it functions below the unit of its own rank or as part of another grammatical unit. Berry (1975:113) defines it as "the functioning of a formal item, which by virtue of its own structure is a member of one unit, as if it were a member of a lower unit".

Following the Systemic Functional Grammatical model, the English grammatical unit is arranged in a rank scale with the sentence or the clause complex as the highest unit and the morpheme as the lowest unit. "Rank refers to the respective position of each unit in the hierarchy

(Adejare and Adejare, 2006:99). It means that a sentence consists of one or more clauses; a clause consists of one or more groups; a group consists of one or more words and a word consists of one or more morphemes. Each of these ranks refers to a unit of meaning (Bloor and Bloor, 1995:6). A shift in rank occurs when a unit of a higher rank functions at a lower unit or as part of a lower unit. A clause can be rank-shifted to function as an element within another clause (as subject, complement, or adjunct) or as part of a group as a qualifier while a group can equally be rank-shifted as part of another group. This downward movement of grammatical units from a higher rank to a lower rank or as part of another unit forms an aspect of the syntactic features of Ojaide's poetry which this paper investigates.

Rank-shifting is an important syntactic stylistic device deployed by both creative and non-creative writers as well. At the qualifier position in a nominal group, rank-

shifted structures help to encode more semantic load on the head of the nominal group. They also have experiential function as they have the potentials of specifying and characterising the head of a nominal group. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:330) state that in the information structure, items at the post modifier position (rank-shifted items) have great potentials as news. Rank-shifted structures tend to lead to the complexity of style. Thus, they have implication(s) for sentence typology and the attainment of reading and writing competencies. This is because semantically complex sentences may be wrongly classified as syntactically complex sentences. It should be noted that the recursive nature of language exhibited by rank-shifting is a powerful tool in the hands of creative writers and the structural adjustment occasioned by rank-shifted groups and clauses is quite significant in the expression of meaning (Osakwe, 1995:35).

Theoretical Approach: Scale and Category Grammar

This study is a linguistic stylistic analysis of a literary text. And to do this, one requires knowledge of how the system of language in a text works. The inadequacy of several critical methods to yield a full and convincing explication of the notion of style is as a result of an absence of appropriate linguistic theory. Style being a characteristic use of language, it is difficult to see how the use of a system can be understood unless the system has been well mapped out (Ohman, 1964:425). This calls for a choice of a grammatical model in any stylistic study.

The theoretical model adopted for this study is the Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday's "Scale and Category Grammar" (Halliday, 1961). The "Scale and Category Grammar" derives its name from its two most important components: scale and category. This model recognises three primary categories of linguistic description – *substance*, *form* and *context*; and four secondary categories of linguistic description: *grammar*, *lexis*, *phonology* and *semantics*. *Substance* is the physical manifestation of language which is made up of phonic and graphic materials of language. Phonic is studied in phonology while graphic is studied in orthography or graphology. *Form* incorporates grammar and lexis while

context relates language form to the non-linguistic features of the situation in which language is used (Tomori, 1977:44-45). *Grammar* is the level of form accounted descriptively using four fundamental categories: *unit*, *structure*, *class* and *system*. These four categories of grammar suggested by Halliday (1961) are universal and are sufficient in the description of any language. *Unit* is the stretch of utterance that carries grammatical patterns, and there are five grammatical units in English: *sentenceclause*, *group*, *word* and *morpheme* and they are hierarchically arranged from the highest to the lowest. *Structure* is the "arrangement of elements ordered in places" (Halliday, 1961:255). The elements making up the structure of a clause are subject, predicator, complement and adjunct (S) P (C) (A); and a group has the structure modifier, headword, qualifier (m) h (q). (The items not enclosed in parenthesis are obligatory elements of structure).

The *class* is the unit set up to account for linguistic patterning. It is the grouping of members of a given unit which is defined by operation in the structure of the unit next above (Halliday, 1961:260). It accounts for paradigmatic relation. The grammar also operates at the level of *system* which allows speakers choice from sets of elements. "Choice" here, according to Muir (1972:10) (cited in James 1980:34), is "The selection of one particular term at one place on the chain in preference to another term or other terms which are also possible at that place". It also recognizes three scales of abstraction used in grammatical description: *rank*, *exponence* and *delicacy*. The scale of rank handles the hierarchical ordering of grammatical units and related issues of shift in rank. Exponence relates the category of the theory to the data while the scale of *delicacy* is the depth of descriptive detail. The above universal categories of grammar afford any analyst an adequate model that accounts for any type of linguistic analysis. This underscores its appropriateness for our data.

Data selection and Procedure for Data Analysis

Tanure Ojaide is one of the leading poets in the discourse of modern Nigerian poetry. He has published twenty different twenty collections of poems between 1973 and 2018. Two major concerns of his poetry are the environmental degradation and deprivation of his Niger Delta and the socio-political issues ravaging his country, Nigeria. In the light of the above, six poems are selected from three different collections to explore how Ojaide appropriates the linguistic device of rank-shifting in

projecting these issues in his poetry. In our analytical procedure, each poem is analysed one after the other to give room for a detailed, rigorous and qualitative close analysis.

In our analysis, we pay attention to the elements of structure. Structure is the second theoretical category of grammar as discussed by Halliday (1961) in “Scale and Category Grammar”. Structure is that grammatical category which accounts for the composition of a unit in terms of functional elements and for the relationships between these elements. Among the five units of grammar, (sentence, clause, group, word and morpheme), the clause and the group structures are analysed in our data to show the manifestation of syntactic shift in rank in meaning making. Our analyses follow the description of clause and group structures as described by Adejare and Adejare (1996, 2006).

According to them, the structure of a clause makes use of four elements: subject (S), predicator (P), complement (C) and adjunct (A). These four categories of SPCA are the slots into which the five groups (nominal group, verbal group, adjectival group, adverbial group and prepositional group) are analysed to generate various English clauses. The group structure has the terms modifier (m), head (h) and qualifier (q). The head is the obligatory element of the group on which all other elements of the group depend syntactically. Elements which precede the head are modifiers while those which follow it are qualifiers. A combination of this gives us four group structural types of *h*, *mh*, *mq*, and *hq*, at the nominal group level. In addition, we need to draw attention to the structure of the prepositional group which is important in rank-shifting. Morley (1985:12-15) says that the terms “modifier” “head” and “qualifier” are less satisfactory for the description of the prepositional group. Bloor and Bloor (2004:145) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:359-360) state that a prepositional group is a simple preposition without any modification while a preposition plus a nominal group (as in: *on the burning deck*) is a prepositional phrase, but not a group. But to Adejare and Adejare (1996:238 & 2006:299), a prepositional group is headed by the word class preposition with a modifier which is usually a nominal group or a clause. Thus, it has the structural formula *h q* or *m h q* (Adejare & Adejare, 2004:300). For our analysis, Adejare and Adejare’s (1996 & 2006)

description is adopted for its uniformity with other group structures and for its emphasis on rank-shifting.

Data Analysis

“Army of microbes” (*Delta blues and Home Songs*, 43)

Rank-shifted structure as qualifier to the head of the nominal groups is a major linguistic device in “Army of microbes”. The poem is a single clause poem of eleven stanzas. The first ten stanzas are made up of *To*-prepositional groups functioning as Adjunct while the last stanza is made up of one line with the structure SPCA. This gives the poem a clause pattern of A¹⁰SPCA with the ten prepositional groups functioning as multiple introductory Adjuncts:

A

/ [To the usurper-chieftain who has set his rabid guard dogs against streets of impoverished ones] /

A

/ [To the uniformed caste of half-literate soldiery who close people’s mouths with trigger ready hands] /

A

/ [To robbers who beat loud the drums they stole from those they feel are blind and deaf to their loss] /

A

/ [To the army of insatiable microbes that have brought plagues to the land] /

A

/ [To the ruling council fat in the neck and thigh but whose plans make wraiths of workers] /

A

/ [To those who have creased faces of farmers and fishers with lines of hunger and pain] /

A

/ [To the Hyena and his cavalry of hangmen that litter the landscape with mounds] /

A

/ [To the cabal of loyalty and fealty that sold the rest for coded Swiss account] /

A

/ [To the executioner and his legion of praise-singers who maimed the land’s totem pet] /

A

/ [[To the petty head in his lair of Aso Rock who spreads sorrow into every home] /

S P C A

/ I / say, / Shame / on you and your kind. /

As shown above, each stanza is a *To*-prepositional group functioning as adjunct in the structure of the clause. Adjunct, a clause element, contributes additional but not essential information to the clause (Eggins, 2004:158). It is an optional element which can be deleted in the structure of the clause. However, the poet has chosen to retain and repeat this introductory adjunct to foreground his vituperations, audacity, bravery and courage to confront the maniac military leadership in his country. This culminates in the pungency in the last line of the poem. The use of multiple adjuncts in this poem is significant. They add ideational meanings to the poem; since they are circumstantial adjuncts which express some circumstances relating to the content of the clause (see Eggins, 2004:159). Each prepositional group functioning as adjunct, and as a stanza in the poem, provides an essential evil mark of the ruling military class which the poet wants to share with his audience. Within each prepositional group, the poet uses rank-shifted structures to qualify an NMG functioning as complement to the preposition. The use of such structures has implications for textual density, especially where there are recursions as we have in stanza ten of the poem:

To the petty head [in his lair [of
Aso Rock]]
[[who spreads sorrow into every
home]]

In the above, the entire prepositional group, *in his lair of Aso Rock*, modifies the noun *head*, while *of Aso Rock* qualifies *lair*. The nominal relative clause *who spreads sorrow into every home* qualifies the entire nominal group. These are recursive in structure. Such recursive structures make a text verbose. The verbosity which such structures create is against the poetic norm which is expected to be economical and dense in the use of words. It further creates complexity and contributes to the prosaic nature of the poem. It also enables the poet to encode more meanings on the head of a group and achieves more communicative effect. The use of post-modifications of this nature is not strange in normal English discourse. Within such structures, Ojaide creates new possibilities which enable him to describe in detail and evoke the effect of disapproval of the military regime of General Abacha which this poem focuses on. Through

such structures, Ojaide creates different layers of meanings. In the above extract, the first rank-shifted prepositional group *in his lair* paints a picture of the ruling military class as wild animals while the second, *of Aso Rock*, locates the residence of these wild beasts as Aso rock, the seat of power in Nigeria. The third, a rank-shifted relative clause, presents the impact of the misrule of the military in every home.

The picture of the army/ruling military junta which the poet paints is realised through rank-shifted structures functioning as qualifiers/post modifiers to the head of nominal groups (NMG). The title of the poem, “Army of microbes”, is an *h q* nominal group, while *Army* is the head of the nominal group, *of microbes* is the qualifier thus:

Army [of microbes]
h q

The qualifier here tells us the type of army as a destructive one. In stanza four, the poet provides two levels of meaning: the nature of the army and the havoc they have wrecked on the land. This information is provided in a prepositional group. The prepositional group has the structure of *h q*; the head of the group is *To* while the remaining eleven words in the stanza function as qualifier/post-modifier to the preposition as shown below:

/ To / [the army of insatiable microbes
h q
that have brought havoc to the land] /

The *q* element above is a nominal group with *m h q* structure. The *m* is the determiner *the*, the *h* (the most important word in the group) is *army* while the *q* is a prepositional group which is rank-shifted as a qualifier/post modifier to the head of the nominal group *army* for the purpose of characterising the type of army as destructive. This qualifier element to the preposition *To* that is rank-shifted as part of another group has the potentials to function as an element within a clause; but here it is stepped down to function as part of another group to provide relevant information which the poet wants to share. Thus, we have the structure:

/ the / army / [of insatiable microbes
m h q

that have brought plague to the land] /

Again, the *of* prepositional group above, rank-shifted as a qualifier in a nominal group, has the *h q* structure where *of* is the head of the group and the *q* element is another nominal group with the structure *m h q* functioning as a qualifier to the preposition. The *m* in this nominal group is the epithet *insatiable* with its experiential function; the *h* is the noun *microbes* while the *q* is a rank-shifted nominal relative clause embedded as a qualifier to the noun *microbes*:

insatiable / microbes /
 m h
 [[that have brought plague to the land]]
 q

The clause enclosed in double square brackets above is embedded to encode more semantic load on the head of the nominal group *microbes*. The information it provides is newsworthy as it tells us what the destructive army has done to the land. As a full clause, it has its own internal constituents and can function independently as a main clause:

S P C A
 // that / have brought / plague / to the land //

but within this poem, it is subsumed under a group to encode meaning on the head of the group.

In stanza five, Ojaide rank-shifts two clauses conjoined by a coordinating conjunction *but* to present contrasting pictures of the affluence of the ruling military class and the impoverished ordinary masses, the Nigerian workers:

To the ruling council
 [[fat in the neck and thigh]]
 But [[whose plans make wraiths of workers]]

As in stanza three, the entire stanza is a prepositional group which functions as Adjunct. *To* is the prepositional head of the group while all the other words post-modify *To*. The qualifiers to the preposition group are rank-shifted clauses. *Council* is the head of the nominal group functioning as a qualifier to the preposition *To*. It is post-modified by two rank-shifted clauses. The first is a reduced relative clause enclosed in the first double

square brackets. Its subject and predicator are ellipted. The second is a full relative clause with its internal constituents. The meaning Ojaide expresses here is the two sides of the ruling council. The first rank-shifted clause describes the affluence of the ruling council while the second rank-shifted clause describes the effect of the activities of the ruling class on the masses.

“Ughelli” (*Labyrinths of the Delta*, 75)

Syntactic shift in rank is a major communicative device in this poem. It is a poem of three stanzas and the first two stanzas consist of rank-shifted structures. This poem is environmentally conscious and ecologically sensitive to the people of the Niger Delta. Here, Ojaide bemoans and condemns the senseless destruction, exploration, exploitation, deprivation and devastation suffered by the flora and fauna and the entire humanity and the natural environment of the Niger Delta region of his home country, Nigeria. Symbolically, the title of the poem, “Ughelli”, stands for all the oil rich towns, villages and creeks in the Niger Delta. Painfully, Ughelli is raped, disrobed, defiled and the poet is in pain as he expresses his anguish through the language of the poem. In achieving this, Ojaide lists his observations through the use of multiple rank-shifted *to*-infinitive clauses and *for*-prepositional groups as Adjunct. This gives the entire poem the clause structural pattern of A₁₄ S P C as analysed below:

A
 [[To see her dry-skinned
 [[when her oil rejuvenates hags]]]]

A
 [[to leave her in darkness
 [[when her fuel lights the universe]]]]

A
 [[to starve her despite all her produce]]

A
 [[to let her dehydrate before the wells bored into
 her heart]]

A
 [[to have her naked despite her innate
 industry]]

A
 [[to keep her without roads [[when
 her sweat tars the outside world]]

A
 [[to make her homeless [[when her
 idle neighbours inhabit skyscrapers]]

A
 [[to see her lonely when sterile ones
 use her offspring as servants]]

A
 [[to regard the artisan as a non-
 person when drones celebrate with her sweat,]]

A
 [[for the palm's oil to be called the fig
 tree's]]

A
 [[for the goddess of wealth not to be
 complimented for her gifts

A
 but spat upon by raiders of her
 bosom]]

A
 [[for one to earn so much and denied
 all except life –
 robbery wears official marks in
 official bills –]]

A
 [[and for her to be sucked anaemic by
 an army of leeches,]]

S P C
 // it / is / a big shame. //

As shown above, stanza one is made up nine rank-shifted *to*-infinitive clauses functioning as Adjunct. The use of multiple rank-shifted adjuncts provides circumstantial information on the nature of the devastation, exploitation and deprivation going on in the Niger Delta. It affords the poet a means of listing these devastations and deprivations and bringing them to the knowledge of the readers. Within the internal structure of some of these rank-shifted non-finite clauses, Ojaide further rank-shifts other structures to provide relevant information which he wants to communicate. For instance, in the first two lines of stanza one, such rank-shifted structures help Ojaide to present a vivid theme of deprivation in the midst of plenty:

P C A A
 [[To see / her / dry-skinned /
 [[when her oil rejuvenates hags]]]]

[[to leave / her / in darkness /
 [[when her fuel lights the universe]]]]

And such contrast is further presented in lines six and seven:

P C A A
 [[to keep / her / without roads / [[when her
 sweat tars the outside world]]

P C C A
 [[to make / her / homeless / [[when her idle
 neighbours inhabit skyscrapers]]]]

In the above four extracts, the final adjuncts are rank-shifted as they have their internal structure of A S P C at the tertiary level of delicacy:

A S P C
 [[when / her oil / rejuvenates /
 hags]]

A S P C
 [[when / her fuel /
 lights / the universe]]

A S P C
 [[when / her sweat /
 tars / the outside world]]

A S P
 C
 [[when / her idle
 neighbours / inhabit / skyscrapers]]

The information presented in these rank-shifted clauses is news, and they are in contrast with the reality presented in the previous part of the clause. Thus, *dry-skinned* contrasts with *rejuvenates hags*, *darkness* contrasts *lights the universe*, *without roads* contrasts *tars the outside world*, and *homeless* contrasts *inhabit skyscrapers*. The information which the poet presents in the rank-shifted structures brings out this contrastive meaning and the deprivation which the poet wants to share with his audience.

A similar structure is sustained in the second stanza with four rank-shifted *to*-infinitive clauses functioning as adjunct. However, there is a slight variation in the structure. Here, the *to*-infinitive clauses which function as adjuncts have a subject introduced by *for* which is perhaps acting more as a conjunction than as a preposition (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1976:320). The first three lines of the

stanza exemplify this syntactic pattern and its message:

[[for the palm’s oil to be called the fig’s]]
 [[for the goddess of wealth not to be complimented for her gifts
 but spat upon by raiders of her bosom]]

The information in these rank-shifted clauses enables the poet to further underscore the theme of denial, deprivation and exploitation which is the plight of the Niger Deltans. As presented within the structures above, the oil of the palm is now called the oil of the fig, the goddess of wealth which is the producer of the oil wealth is no longer complimented, and instead, she is spat upon by the looters of her bossom.

“Abuja” (*Delta Blues and Home Songs*, 46)

The bulk of the messages in “Abuja” are presented through rank-shifted clauses. The first three lines constitute adverbial clauses of place/position realised through a simple adverb *here* qualified by a rank-shifted adverbial clause:

Here / [[where all cardinal points meet in a capital]] *h* / [[*q*]]
 here / [[where rocks raise homes to the sky]] *h* / [[*q*]]
 here / [[where the savannah rolls over the soil]] *h* / [[*q*]]

To clarify the head-qualifier structure of the adverbial group, the poet introduces a nominal group with modifier head qualifier (m h q) structure in line four:

the / coven / [[where witches plot the demise of others]]/
 m h q

From the above, the qualifier nature and function of the clauses become clearer. The stylistic significance of this is that they help the poet to encode more semantic load on the head of the group which they qualify. It is through these rank-shifted clauses that the poet presents the explicit pictures of wickedness, exploitation, wastefulness, corruption, insensitivity, and utter disregard for national pride that goes on in Abuja. From

line five to line fifteen, rank-shifted structures are used to function as elements of clause structure:

// this / is / [[where chiefs celebrate on the sweat of state]] //
 // this / is / [[where range chickens consume and scatter leftovers]] //
 // this / is / [[where the hyena’s den is guarded by rings of packs]] //
 // this / is / [[where the hyena corners the hare]] //
 and swallowed it, leaving no scent for a trail
 // this / is / [[where the boa-constrictor strangled its catch]] //
 // this / is / [[where robbers boast of their callous acts]] //
 & laugh at the plight of a hundred million cowards
 // This / is / [[where the national flag covers a cesspool]] //
 // This / is / [[where a god led his worshippers to die]] //
 // This / is / [[where I weep for my entire land.]] //

S P A

The grammatical units at A enclosed in double square brackets above are rank-shifted adverbial clauses functioning as Adjunct. At the secondary level of delicacy, they can be analysed into their constituent parts. The last three lines illustrate this:

... [[where / the national flag / covers / a cesspool]] *A S P C*
 ... [[where / a god / led / his worshippers / to die]] *A S P A*
 ... [[where / I / weep / for my entire land.]] *A S P A*

The meaning expressed in these rank-shifted structures functioning Adjunct is a description of the place, Abuja, and the nefarious activities that go on there. These are what the poet disapproves of and which he shares with his readers.

“The Cross” (*Labyrinths of the Delta*, 73)

As an element of clause structure, rank-shifted to-infinitive clauses also provide Ojaide a means of stating the reasons why the Niger Delta blood (oil) is needed in “The Cross”:

S P C A

// They / want / my blood / [[to keep the country one]] //

// they / want / my blood / [[to bring peace to the state]] //

// they / need / my blood / [[to double and redouble their wealthy]] //

In the above, the *to*-infinitive clauses in the three lines are rank-shifted to function as Adjuncts. As a clause, each has a clause pattern P C C, P C A, and P C respectively. They help the poet to list the reasons why the exploiters suck the blood of the Niger Delta region: for unity, peace and for wealth creation for *the big ones* at the detriment of the producers. Thus, it foregrounds the theme of selfishness and exploitation because the much talked about unity will cease to exist at the moment the oil dries up.

In this poem, rank-shifted clauses are also used to provide the needed information on why the poet personal’s blood is needed:

& S P C

(i) // And / I / am / the one [[that must shed the blood
[[on which the big ones thrive;]]]] //

S P- A -P C

(ii) // they / will / only / accept / my blood type
[[which they say is light and sweet...]]

In (i) above, the structure of the clause is S P C. The C element is a nominal group with the structure *m h q*. The *q* element offers two levels of descriptive details. The first is the fact that the poet persona is the one that must shed the blood; the second is that it is on his blood that the big ones thrive. While the first information is provided through a rank-shifted *that*-relative clause, the second is provided through a relative clause with preposition as head. In (ii) above, the rank-shifted relative clause *which they say is light and sweet* describes the fine quality of the poet persona’s “blood”. Through this rank-shifted clause, one understands that *blood* as

used in this poem refers to the Niger Delta oil which is known as bonny light or bonny sweet, one of the best quality crude oil in the world oil market. It is on this oil that *the big ones*, that is, the bigger tribes, the leaders, thrive. Through these rank-shifted clauses, Ojaide projects the theme of oil exploitation which is aimed at impoverishing the producers.

“No Longer Our Own Country” (*The Blood of Peace and Other Poems* 9 - 10)

In this poem, Ojaide thematises the loss and waste of his beloved country, Nigeria, through the use of syntactic shift in rank. The bulk of information provided here is through rank-shifted structures. Clauses are rank-shifted as elements of structure to provide the needed lucid information. The following are some extracts which exemplify rank-shifted clauses in this poem:

S P C

a. // We / have lost / it,
[[the country we were born into]] //

S P A

b // we / live / in a country
[[that is no longer our own]] //

S P

c. // Our sacred trees / have been cut down /
A A
[[to make armchairs / for the rich and titled]] //

S P C

d. // Where / are / the tall trees
[[that shielded us from the sun’s spears]] //

S P C A

e. // where / are / they / now [[that hot winds
blow parching sands and bury us in dunes]] //

In (a) above, a nominal clause functioning as complement is rank-shifted in the structure of the clause. This rank-shifted clause is in restrictive apposition to the head of the nominal group *it*. An interesting feature of this rank-shifted clause is the syntactic fronting of the nominal group *the country* which functions as a

complement in the structure of the clause and refers directly to *it*, the preceding pronoun. This is a foregrounding technique to draw attention to the fact that the country is our inheritance. The fact that we no longer own the country is provided through another rank-shifted clause functioning as a post-modifier in the nominal group in:

S P A
 // we / live / in a country [[that is no longer our
 own]] //
 m h q

the A, in the above clause, is a prepositional group made up of the preposition *in* and its complement, *a country that is no longer our own*, which is a nominal group with the structure *m h q*. The *q* element is a nominal relative clause *that is no longer our own*. It is a rank-shifted clause functioning as a qualifier/post-modifier to the noun *country*. Its function here is descriptive and emphatic. It describes the country and emphasises the fact that the country is lost. Thus, it foregrounds pain at the loss of the country.

In (c), (d) and (e) Ojaide uses rank-shifted clauses to bemoan the deforestation that has become the lots of the Niger Delta as a result of oil exploration and exploitation. In (c) a non-finite *to*-infinitive clause functioning as adjunct is used to attribute the reasons for the wanton destruction of our trees and our bushes:

S P A
 // Our sacred trees / have been cut down / [[to make
 armchairs for the rich and titled]] //

The pain expressed through the rank-shifted clause here is the fact that the rich and titled who exploit us physically and materially also destroy our environment that produces succour. In (d), the poet laments not just the loss of the trees but also the loss of its protective ambiance as trees are sources of curative herbs. This information is provided through the use of rank-shifted *that*-relative clause functioning as qualifier to the head of the nominal group *trees*:

S P C
 // Where / are / the tall trees [[that shielded us from the
 sun's spears]] //
 m m h q

In (e), a rank-shifted *that*-nominal relative clause modifies the adverb *now* to show the impact and the effect of the destruction of the trees on us in the present time. Now, we suffer the harshness of the *wind* as it blows parches on us and bury us in *dunes* because we have lost the protective effect of *the trees*. In this poem, Ojaide does not only decry the loss of the country, but also the loss of the flora and fauna, and human resources through the use of rank-shifted clauses.

Furthermore, the poet decries the loss of the warriors who protected our traditional norms from violation, and those who offered themselves as sacrifices to save us from scourges. All these pieces of information are provided through the use of rank-shifted clauses:

S P C
 // Where/ are/ those warriors [[careful not to
 break taboos]] [[who kept us
 A
 from savage violation]] / now [[that we face
 death?]] //

The above is a *wh*-interrogative clause with the structure S P C A. The C and A elements have rank-shifted clauses as qualifiers. The C element is a nominal group with the structure *m h q*, where the lexical item *warrior* is the head of the nominal group. *Warrior* is modified by two elements: an adjectival clause (*careful not to break taboo*) and a nominal relative clause (*who kept us from salvage violation*). The adjective *careful* is modified by a *to*-infinitive clause preceded by the negator, *not*, to negate the clause. The second qualifier to the nominal group head *warrior* is a relative clause capable of functioning as an independent clause. Thus, it has the clause structure of S P C A. Functionally; the information provided by these two rank-shifted structures is descriptive.

“Invocation” (*The blood of Peace and other Poems* 31- 32)

In this poem, Ojaide presents the combative and revolutionary nature of his songs/poems. And he does this by using rank-shifted structures as qualifiers in a nominal group to provide information that can be regarded as news (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). This can be seen in the first line of stanzas one to three and five to seven below:

(i) Birds [[entertaining the sky with melodies]]

- (ii) trees [[buttressed in the earth’s bosom]]
- (iii) Hurricane [of the storm season]
- (iv) Pools [[gathering in a deluge]]
- (v) Moon [full to the brim of night]
- (vi) Feathers [of my singing creed]

The above are NMGs with *h q* structures. The *h* is the first lexical item in each line while the items in square brackets are the rank-shifted structures. In (i) the rank-shifted structure is an *-ing* infinitive clause rank-shifted as a qualifier to *Birds*. Through this, Ojaide invokes the birds of the air to add melodies to his songs. In (ii), the rank-shifted structure is also an *-ed* infinitive clause. Through this, Ojaide invokes the trees to give strength to his songs. A prepositional group having the potentials to function as an adjunct in a full clause is rank-shifted as a qualifier to *Hurricane* in (iii), while another *-ing* infinitive clause is rank-shifted as a qualifier in (iv). In (v), the *Moon* is qualified by a reduced nominal relative clause. The function of this qualifier is to invoke the *Moon* to give beauty and brilliance to the poet’s song. And in (vi) the rank-shifted prepositional group is used to invoke the *feather* (birds) to inspire the poet to an *unassailable pitch*. The above analysis shows that rank-shifting is used to achieve the major objective of this poem which is invocation as the title of the poem shows. Furthermore, rank-shifted clauses as elements of structure also enable Ojaide to state the functions of his different types of his songs in stanza eight thus:

S P
 // I / must sing //
 C A
 // rainsong / [[to fructify the dying desert]] //
 C A
 // fishsong / [[to revive the streams]] //
 C A
 // harvestsong / [[to fill the body]] //
 C A
 // warsong / [[to arm the
 threatened]] //

As the above analysis shows, the items under A are to-infinitive clauses. They are all rank-shifted in each clause. Their semantic implication is the function of each type of song in the real world. Thus, the use of rank-shifting here is an important communicative strategy.

Conclusion

This study has shown the extent to which Ojaide appropriates the linguistic device of rank-shifting not only in projecting his messages but also as a style marker in his poetry. Both groups and clauses are rank-shifted in Ojaide’s poetry. Such rank-shifted structures make Ojaide’s poetry prosaic and simple. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why Ogede (1996) refers to Ojaide’s poetry as prosaic and lacks the paced cadence and musical rhythm. From our findings, this simplicity is not a poetic weakness but a feature of the language of modern African poets who have been described as “linguistic iconoclast” (Ojaide, 1996:83). Unlike the early Clark or Soyinka, “there is a new discursive unpretentiously clear voice with almost the syntax of prose... rather than in difficult language... the poets use simple language to match their concern for the common people” (Ojaide, 1996:84). It is this concern to reach out to the people which inform their use of prosaic language. His uses of such structures provide explicit and detailed information on the head of the nominal groups they qualify.

At the level of qualifiers to the head of a nominal group, rank-shifted structures provide explicit information as well as perform descriptive functions on the head of the nominal group they qualify. As we have seen in the analysis, the recursiveness of such rank-shifted structures enables the poet to encode different layers of meanings which he wants to share with his readers. Finally, it is further discovered that rank-shifted structures do not give room for economy of words as is the norm in poetic language.

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